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" MY MOTHERLAND " SERIES XE NO. 23

WATER FOR HEALTH AND CURE

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WATER FOR HEALTH AND CURE

The vital part which water plays, both in the preservation of health and as a curative agent, is now receiving considerable attention; and there are hundreds of physicians who bring relief to the sick and the distressed with that single article.

Though in recent years, India's attention has been drawn to this subject by German doctors, the curative value of water had been fully recognised by our forefathers, and the insistence on practices like *achamanam*, (sipping water in small quantities) amply testify to it. The most common error that people in India commit is the inadequate quantity of water they consume. When they feel thirsty, many people resort to tea or coffee and there are a few condemned folk who will even insist on intoxicants. The water in all these assists the human system to some extent; but every one will be far healthier if the required quantity of water is taken in its pure and natural state. Many, again, are under the impression that only when they have taken in some tea or coffee, do they feel brisk or their bowels move. If they will take this hint and replace that stimulant with equally hot water, they will find the reaction, either on their bowels or on their general health, to be far more healthy. In fact, it is the experience of not a few people, that a cup of warm water, both before returning to bed and the first thing in the morning after cleaning the mouth, leads to many good results, specially in combating constipation.

Use More Water

There is considerable divergence of opinion among medical men as to the effect of drinking water with meals. Pro-

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vided that the cooking is properly done and one has the good sense to masticate the food properly, very rarely is it necessary to drink water with meals, specially as one of the ingredients in all Indian meals is milk or buttermilk. At the same time, the general verdict of students of health is that a small quantity of water taken with meals does absolutely no harm.

At the same time, it is necessary to record the fact that in India, many people do not take in as much water as their system needs. That is the most common of the errors that lead to constipation and other complaints of the bowels. This is a point which most people will do well to note, but let them not go to the other extreme of drinking too much water or in large quantities at a time.

Water plays a twofold part in our system. It is necessary for the primary purpose of bodily existence and secondly, it is an excellent cleansing agent, internally. And any one can easily convince himself about it by sipping in a good quantity of water in small doses in billiousness or constipation. Then again, in indigestion, hot water proves helpful in evacuating the stomach through vomitting; and the enema is equally useful in cleansing the lower intestines.

On the subject of bath, very little need be said in India where it is ordained as a religious duty. And the question of hot or cold water depends on one's own temperament and vitality. Warm water is of course to be insisted on when the person is experiencing a chill or is convalescing after an illness; but all medical men are agreed that cold water bath must always be the ideal of even sickly people. It has an excellent tonic value, specially in the early morning.

The Enema

The prejudice that persists against the use of the enema is most unfortunate; and it may be news to some Indians to be told that it was quite commonly used by our forefathers

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There were no rubber tubes at the time; but they had quite a convenient instrument in the stem of the *Pappai* tree.

In many cases where the patient's life was even despaired of, the enema has worked almost like a miracle—specially where the illness had been accompanied by the stoppage of the bowels. In one case within the writer's experience, two surgeons had given their final verdict that only an immediate operation could save a lady; but their assistant had a happy brain wave. After the experts departed, he suggested an enema and the next morning when the surgeons returned with their instruments and other paraphernalia, they were surprised to find the patient almost normal—no pain in abdomen, not even the discomfort.

The enema is always to be recommended when there has been the stoppage of the bowels for over 24 hours. Its constant use leads to the weakening of health; but as a help at critical times, it is invaluable; and when the immediate danger is over, one can easily avoid its use by proper diet.

As to the quantity of water to be used, a pint is generally considered quite adequate and the most convenient posture is to lie down on the right side. Warm or cold water can be used and many physicians recommend both, cold to follow the hot. Where only one is preferred, it is best to have cold water and retain it for a few minutes, until it gets warm.

The Steam Bath

Water, as a curative agent in illness, is seen at its best in the various special baths; and the steam-bath is perhaps the most useful of all: and Gandhiji gives the following convenient method of having the same.*

"A spirit or kerosene oil stove, or a wood or coal fire should be kept burning under an ordinary cane chair. Over

* *Guide to Health.*

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the fire should be placed a vessel of water with the mouth covered ; and over the chair a sheet or blanket is so spread that it may hang down in the front and protect the patient from the heat of the fire. Then the patient should be seated in the chair and wrapped round with a sheet or blanket. Then the vessel should be uncovered, so that the patient may be exposed to the steam issuing from it. Our common practice of covering the head also of the patient is a needless precaution. The heat of the steam passes through the body right up to the head, and gives rise to profuse perspiration on the face. If the patient is too week to sit up, he may be made to lie down on a cot with interstices, taking care to see that none of the steam escapes. Of course, care should also be taken to see that the patient's clothes or the blankets used do not catch fire ; and due consideration should be paid to the state of the patient's health, as an inconsiderate application of steam is fraught with danger. The patient, indeed, feels weak after a steam bath, but this weakness does not last long. Too frequent use of steam, however, enfeebles the constitution, and it is of the highest importance to apply steam with due deliberation, Steam may also be applied to any single part of the body ; in cases of headache, for instance, there is no need to expose the whole body to the steam. The head should be held just over a narrow-mouthed jar of boiling water, and wrapped round with a cloth. Then the steam should be inhaled through the nose so that it may ascend into the head. If the nasal passage is blocked, it will also be opened by this process. Likewise if there be inflammation in any part of the body, it alone need be exposed to the steam."

Effective Relief

One variation in this manner of bath is easily possible. Instead of keeping the water boiling on the oven, a risky business, stones can be heated and put one after another in the

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water once heated to boiling point. This porcess, generates steam in larger quantities and as hot as one can bear; and generally the steam generated by three stones is quite enough for even a robust individual.

This steam bath is very efficacious in fevers, severe headaches, and rheumatic pains, and in the last case, relief is rapid if the steam-bath be followed by a cold bath.

This bath is also useful in local or simple ailments, such as boils and ulcers. The steam is then to be directed primarily to the part concerned. This bath is useful also in case of severe fatigue and sleeplessness. In the last case, sleep is easily coaxed, if after the steam-bath followed by a cold bath, one sleeps in the open air.

The steam-bath sometimes works wonders in longstanding complaints. In one case, a person who had chronic ear trouble, pain and partial deafness extending to over fifteen years—which he was advised was the legacy of a consumptive attack he had—a steam-bath with only two small stones improvised for the moment gave convincing relief. The patient even observed that he felt as fresh as he used to feel after active physical exercise in his youthful days.

The Abdominal Bath

Two other types of bath are also uselul. There is first the abdominal bath popularised by Dr. Kunhe. For that an ordinary oval-shaped tub, in tin or wood, should be filled three-fourths with cold water, and the patient should seat himself in it in such a fashion that his feet and the upper part of the body remain outside the water, and the rest of the body up to the hips inside it. The feet may preferably be placed on a low foot-stool. The patient should sit in the water quite naked, but, if he feels cold, the feet and the upper part of the body should be covered with a blanket. If a shirt is worn, it should be kept entirely outside the water. The

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bath should be taken in a room where there is plenty of fresh air and light. The patient should then slowly rub (or cause to be rubbed) the abdomen with a small rough towel from 5 to 30 minutes, or more. The effect is instantly felt in most cases. In cases of rheumatism, the wind in the stomach escapes in the form of eructations and the like, and in cases of fever, the thermometer falls by one or two degrees. The bowels are readily cleaned by this process; fatigue disappears, sleeplessness is removed, and extreme drowsiness gives place to vigour. The contrariness of the result is more apparent than real; for want of sleep and the excess of it, are both brought on by the same cause. So too, dysentery and constipation, which are both the outcome of indigestion, are cured by this method. Piles of longstanding can also be got rid of by this bath, with proper regulation of diet. Those who are troubled by the necessity for constant spitting should at once resort to this treatment for a cure.

This is also an effective remedy for headaches, homorrages and blood poisoning. Pregnant women are specially recommended to take this bath so as to have easy child birth.

For Eruptive Fevers

In complaints attended by skin eruptions, such as smallpox, another type of bath, called the "wet sheet pack" is useful.

A table or chair is placed in the open air, big enough to allow of the patient lying on it at full length. On it are spread (hanging on either side) some four blankets, less or more according to the state of the weather. Over them are spread two white thick sheets well dipped in cold water, and a pillow is placed under the blankets at one end. Then the patient is stripped naked (with the exception of a small waistcloth, if he so wishes), and made to lie down on the sheet with his hands placed in the arm-pits. Then the sheet

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and blankets are one after another, wrapped round his body, taking care that the parts hanging under the feet are well tucked in so as to cover them. If the patient is exposed to the sun, a wet cloth is put over his head and face, keeping the nose always open. At first the patient will experience some shivering, but this will soon give place to an agreeably warm sensation. He can lie in this position from 5 minutes to an hour or more. After a time he begins to perspire, or at times falls asleep. Soon after coming out of the sheets, he should bathe in cold-water.

This bath is specially effective where the body needs external cleaning and care should always be taken to clean the sheets once used.

Water in Fasting

Mr. K. L. Sarma mentions the following incident that occurred in his own family; his youngest son, then aged about three years, was laid up with severe fever, and according to the practice of the family was allowed to fast; cold water alone was given; sometimes a dose of lime-juice was added to the water; after five days it was known to be a case of small-pox; then the author took special care to see to it that the rule of fasting was strictly obeyed; as the child did not like to have lime-juice in the water, it was omitted, and plain cold water was freely given; it was even given as often as the child could be induced to take it.

After about ten days in all, the eruptions were all out and matured, and the disease began to abate. Until the crisis had definitely passed, the child never asked for food; water was given as often as he could be made to take it.

When the crisis was safely passed, the child began to ask for food, and to get it, once a day; the first day he demanded the water of a tender cocoanut, and this was given; the second day he wanted buttermilk, and this was given; the third day

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he craved a little cold raw milk, which was given; it may be said, in explanation, that it is customary in the family to take raw milk, that is, without heating it, as required by the law of Nature-Cure; on the fourth day the child wanted milk and rice, which was given; up to this time food was given only once daily; in this way the patient regulated his own diet and recovered.

Other Uses

Water, cold or hot, can be applied in many other ways, for specific complaints. For acute pain in the abdomen, relief is easily obtained by fomentation through a bottle filled with hot water. The abdomen is to be covered by a thin cloth and over it the bottle is to be slowly moved.

Gandhiji recommends the following additional effective methods of water treatment:

"Dizziness or delirium can be instantly relieved by tying round the head a cloth dipped in melted ice. People suffering from constipation often derive great benefit by tying round the stomach for some time a piece of cloth dipped in melted ice. Involuntary-seminal discharges can also be often prevented by the same means. Bleeding in any part of the body may be stopped by the application of a bandage dipped in ice-cold water. Bleeding from the nose is stopped by pouring cold water over the head. Nasal diseases, cold and headache, may be cured by drawing pure cold water up the nose. The water may be drawn through one nostril and discharged through the other, or drawn through both nostrils and discharged through the mouth. There is no harm in the water going even into the stomach provided the nostrils are clean. And indeed, this is the best way to keep the nostrils clean. Those who are unable to draw the water up the nostrils may use a syringe, but after a few attempts, it can be done quite easily. All should learn to do this, since it is very

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simple, and at the same time a most effective remedy against headaches, bad smells in the nose, as well as dirty accumulations in the nasal passage."

Achamanam

Regarding *Achamanam*, Mr. K. L. Sarma, states* :—

This is itself a means of internal cooling, of very great efficacy, and an aid to the other cooling methods. In high fevers. it may alone prove a sufficient remedy, apart from pure air and fasting, without baths or packs, except where the sun-cure is also needed. But of course the danger is that the patient may not be given the *Achamana often enough*. Fevers may easily prove dangerous, if sufficient water is not given. The process of the achamana is to give cold water in very minute doses, but often enough, so that the water may be fully assimilated. It is the simplest of all cooling methods. Very cold water, such as is obtained by storing it in earthen pots, is either sipped by the patient, or given to him with a tea spoon, allowing an interval of two or three seconds after every sip or spoonful. Every separate sip or spoonful should be less than ten drops, that is, one-sixth of a teaspoonful. But not less than ten such doses should be given or taken in succession *at one time*—with the intervals between the doses as prescribed. All the doses so given at one time are together called an achamana. In fevers at least twenty doses should be given in a single achamana. But if the patient likes he may have *more* at each time. And the treatment should be repeated every five minutes, until the fever gets milder and safer. In other cases achamanas are of great value; before a meal, for refreshing the nerves, or for curing or preventing fatigue.

In the case of all these directions, it should be noted that their value depends to a large extent on the adoption of other rules for healthy living or natural healing. Most important

* *Practical Nature Cure*

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of all is the need to fast or eat in moderation foods that have no harmful effect. Without these precautions, not even all the baths are likely to prove adequately effective, specially in acute cases.

For Cough

Water treatment is found very effective in cough.

The back of the mouth and the throat are cooled by holding cold water in the mouth lying on the back and gargling the water untill it gets fairly warm. Then it is spit out, and fresh water taken again and similarly held and gargled. A few repetitions of this treatment will relieve the cough: at least for the time being and thus enable you to resort to treatment of a permanent character if this cooling method is not adequate. A wet pack round the neck adds to the promptness of relief.

Stings and Bites

For serious stings such as that of a snake or scorpion other treatment, special mud poultice, has to be resorted to, but where the pain is not of an obstinate or persistent nature it is easily relieved by gushing it with cold water or by a cooling wet bandage. The bandage must be so thick as not to get warm very soon. If the pain re-appears, the gushing may be repeated or more cold water poured. If pain be obstinate, a general steam bath will be found very helpful.

Purity of Water

Great care has to be taken as to the water to be used, not only that we drink, but that we use for baths. Where cold water is required, the best plan is to keep filtered water in mud pots long enough to cool.

For drinking purposes, it is always safe to have the water boiled and filtered by a piece of clean thick cloth like tough Khadi. Rain water is of course the best; but unfortunately,

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in these days, specially in the cities, the air is so laden with impurities that rain water is valueless except where atmospheric conditions are extremely favourable.

Many physicians advise people to use distilled water and some even claim that it can cure all diseases. That is not likely ; but that the use of distilled water proves most beneficial is undoubted—specially where drugs are not taken into the system. It is specially effective in the case of constipation and other bowel complaints.

Finally, one warning may be repeated. Never refuse the patient's request for water. Such refusal often leads to dire consequences, if not death. Give it in small quantities if you are afraid ; but meet the need without fail. And provided the water is pure, no harm can come.

Further, persons who desire to resort to water treatment must not overlook the basic fact that it is one branch of Nature Cure, and that it must not be accompanied by the use of drugs. The two methods of treatment act in quite a contrary way. Take stings or pains for instance. Nature Cure, through water, tries to strengthen the nerves and thus fight the pain, whereas drugs try to deaden the nerves and thus reduce pain. By itself the latter process is calculated to be harmful and one can easily see how out of place, if not unfortunate it is, alongside of water treatment.

In respect of baths, one may go even further and keep out the soap, which is harmful in some respects. Its place can, for instance, be taken by the powder of green gram or a good mixture of clay and sand. Where oil is not used, soap or any other substitute is absolutely unnecessary. Warm rubbing by the hand itself will clean the skin and if that is not desired, a rough Khadi piece will enable one to clean the body to perfection.

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Foolish Fears

One common objection to water cure is that it may lead to chill or cold, or that it will cool the system too far. The baths of course cool the system : but that is only by way of restoring the normal heat of the body. The cooling bath merely gives mild shocks to the human system, which shock reacts in the creation of heat from the body itself. Not only is the heat lost in the bath replaced, but more is generated for the up-keep of the system when it is necessary. In fact these baths act as a tonic—a warning and a help to the body to repair the harm done and take the needful action to set itself right.

Where this reaction is not felt, the patient must resort to milder methods of treatment. He must take the failure of reaction as the intimation that he has gone further than is justified by the strength in his system. In the case of weaker constitutions, it is therefore best to begin with milder applications. For instance, the cooling may be applied to a small part of the skin—the second of the baths described in this pamphlet—and even there, the water used should be just enough for the purpose of covering the abdomen. Another precaution that must be taken is in respect of the coldness of the water. If it is ice-cold, a weak patient or a beginner may feel too much of discomfort. The water may be just as cold as his hand when dipped in it feels bearable. In colder climates or seasons, a little warm water may be used. Then again, the duration of the bath must depend on the patient's health and powers of endurance. All that is needed is a bit of patience, common sense and courage. Finally, it must be recognised that even if an error is made it will not have such serious consequences in water-cure as when mistakes are committed in other methods of treatment.

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A WESTERN VIEWPOINT

The following note from *Good Health* gives the Allopathic viewpoint:—

Water is an element of universal blessing to man. Its benefits are not even confined to its usefulness, for it is used by Nature to beautify the earth and enchant the eye.

The greater part of the planet on which we live is composed of water. So also is the major portion of the human body. The blood is a fluid. In fact, all the actions of the body such as the absorption of food and the interchange of gases, take place in a fluid medium. Waste products are expelled in solution and the body loses several pounds of water daily. To preserve the balance of health this loss must be made good. Insufficient liquid in the system means sluggish and imperfect action, and the retention of poisonous waste matter.

To maintain perfect health, the body requires from two to three pints of water daily. This, of course, should be the purest water available and not too hard. The best times to drink are morning, evening and between meals. Taking two glasses of hot water on rising is the best possible way of beginning the day. In contrast to this, to put poison in the form of tea into the water is about the worst thing to do in the morning. In time this bad habit produces headache, indigestion and general weakness.

In addition to this, water has its external uses. It is the best solvent known, and with the addition of alkali in the form of soap it removes sebaceous material exuded by the

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pores of the skin. Warm baths should be taken frequent ly for this reason. Cold baths may be taken for their ton ic effects by those who are strong.

Water, of course, has most wonderful effects in disea se, equalizing the circulation, reducing inflammation, and easin g pain. In this respect it is the most valuable remedy w e possess.

Lastly, there are the soothing effects of the sound of running water. The music of the babbling brook reliev es the tired brain, soothes the nerves and induces sleep.

Be sure, then, that you appreciate the value of water and use it as it comes from the heart of Nature—free from impurity and adulteration.

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